United Nations A/58/PV.81

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

81st plenary meeting
Wednesday, 25 February 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of sympathy to the Government and the people of Morocco in connection with the recent earthquake in that country

The President: Before proceeding to the item on our agenda, I should like, on behalf of all members of the General Assembly, to extend our deepest sympathy to the Government and the people of Morocco for the tragic loss of life and the serious injuries and extensive material damage that have resulted from an earthquake that occurred yesterday morning, Tuesday, 24 February 2004. May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any request for help.

I now call on the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Very briefly, Mr. President, I would like to express the gratitude of the Moroccan Government for the generous words that you have just spoken on behalf of the international community, and for the condolences you offered. I must say that since yesterday, after the sad event that my country has experienced — this earthquake which has caused hundreds of victims — we have seen a great expression of solidarity and assistance, which has warmed our hearts. We would like here to thank all the countries that have spontaneously responded and have offered their assistance and support to the victims.

Agenda item 124 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

The President: Next, I should like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/58/688/Add.2 and Add.3, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/58/688 and Add.1, Paraguay and Lebanon have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in those documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 117 (*continued*)

Human rights questions

Note by the Secretary-General (A/58/718)

The President: By its resolution 48/141 of 20 December 1993, the General Assembly decided to create the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Secretary-General proposes, in the light of the provisions of resolution 48/141 set out in his note, to appoint Justice Louise Arbour of Canada

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

04-25683 (E)

as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for a term of office of four years.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to approve the proposal of the Secretary-General to appoint Justice Louise Arbour of Canada as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for a term of office of four years?

It was so decided.

The President: I call on the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Bennouna (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I have known Ms. Louise Arbour and appreciated her work during her tenure as chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and I must say that the proposal of the Secretary-General and the decision just taken by the General Assembly are most appropriate and wise steps to fill the post of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Indeed, Ms. Arbour has all the qualities to best carry out that responsibility. As a talented academic, she has in-depth legal knowledge and has shown courage and clarity of thought in defending fundamental human rights and in punishing the gravest international crimes against such rights. I am convinced that Ms. Louise Arbour will give the international community the benefit of all her talents and thus will advance the cause of human rights by developing in particular education, prevention and assistance in a world representing a great diversity of cultures and civilizations. But, as we all know, no cultural characteristic — whatever it be — can justify violating the fundamental rights of the human person, with men and women on an equal footing.

Here, we cannot fail to pay tribute to the memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a victim of indiscriminate terrorism on his final humanitarian mission. His passing profoundly affected all of us; it left the Organization with scars that are healing only with difficulty.

In conclusion, I should like to wish Ms. Louise Arbour every success in her new duties. I am convinced that, as she has said, she will meet the challenges awaiting her in one of the most difficult posts in today's world.

The President: I call on the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Loizaga (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I associate myself with your comments, Mr. President, by expressing our solidarity and condolences to the delegation of Morocco, through its Permanent Representative, with regard to the tragedy being endured by that country.

I shall not go into detail, but I also agree with what the representative of Morocco just said regarding the appointment proposed by the Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly. Paraguay, as a member of the Commission on Human Rights, will fully support Ms. Arbour in attaining her objectives and those that define the work of the Office of the High Commissioner.

However, I should like to express an idea that occurred to my delegation. We have endeavoured to find the proper way of proposing it, bearing in mind your concern, Mr. President, that the General Assembly be revitalized — with regard not only to procedures but also to more substantive issues — and that it play its proper role. We believe that, in future, it might be a good idea for proposed candidates — even if we are perfectly familiar with their personal and professional qualities — to introduce themselves in this forum and tell us about their work plans and their objectives. Otherwise, the General Assembly would merely be meeting to accomplish a procedural objective. We believe that we have begun this task, and our delegation is sharing these thoughts with the Assembly so that, the next time an appointment is submitted for approval by the General Assembly, the candidate can be invited so that we can hear about his or her work programme.

Once again, I reiterate that the Mission of Paraguay in Geneva and our whole delegation will fully support Ms. Arbour, whose work and efforts in promoting and defending human rights are well known to us.

The President: I call on the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Mohd Radzi (Malaysia): First of all, I should like to join you, Mr. President, in expressing our condolences to the Government and the people of Morocco on the unfortunate earthquake that has befallen the country.

Speaking for Malaysia, we wish to join others in expressing our warmest congratulations to Ms. Louise Arbour on her appointment as the new United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We are confident that, given her impressive background, qualifications and vast experience, she will undoubtedly carry out her mandate to the best of her ability. We wish to assure her of our fullest support to assist her in discharging her new responsibilities.

At the same time, I wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm the consistent principled position of the Non-Aligned Movement that all human rights — in particular the right to development — are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated; that the international community must treat all human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis; and that the significance of national and regional particularities and of various historical, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds must be respected.

It is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people — in particular the right to development — in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and instruments concerning the rights of women and other related rights.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Mr. Passy (Bulgaria): First of all, allow me to extend our condolences to the people and the Government of Morocco with respect to yesterday's earthquake.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria and in my capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I extend my warmest congratulations to Ms. Louise Arbour on her election as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The OSCE is proud that a prominent citizen of one of our member countries has been elected to that high office. The OSCE would like to work closely, as in the past, with the High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote democracy, human rights and tolerance. I am glad to extend an invitation to Ms. Arbour to speak to the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Tunisia, who will speak on behalf of the African States.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the African Group, I too would like to express the sympathy of the African Group and its member States to the Government and the people of brotherly Morocco with regard to the recent earthquake and the resulting heavy toll in human lives and material damage. Morocco, a brother country member of the African Group, has our fullest sympathy and support in surmounting this trial.

On behalf of the African Group, I am now pleased to express our appreciation of the choice made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, proposing the appointment of Ms. Louise Arbour as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We congratulate Ms. Arbour on her unanimous approval to that post. We understand that this choice was based on Ms. Arbour's personal and professional accomplishments and on her extensive experience in the legal and human rights arenas. The African Group supported this choice and has no doubt that, in carrying out her future duties, Ms. Arbour will display the commitment that has always characterized her, along with the political judgement of which she has shown herself to be capable.

The African Group and its member States will fully support the new High Commissioner in promoting human rights and their widespread acceptance in their entirety and interconnectedness. We wish her much success.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Ryan (Ireland): On behalf of the members of the Group of Western European and other States, Mr. President, I fully associate the members of our group with your expression of condolences to the Government and the people of Morocco following the tragic earthquake yesterday.

The Group of Western European and other States welcomes the approval by the General Assembly of the appointment by the Secretary-General of Justice Louise

Arbour as the new United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Our group believes that Justice Arbour's background, both nationally, serving on the supreme court of Canada, and internationally, as chief Prosecutor for two International Criminal Tribunals — for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda — and as an eminent jurist with vast experience in the field of human rights, highly qualifies her to hold the position of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. She will no doubt bring her personal energies to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Group of Western European and other States congratulates Justice Arbour on her appointment and looks forward to working closely with the new High Commissioner in the future.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Kang (Republic of Korea): We would like to add our voice, Mr. President, to your expression of sympathy to the people of Morocco for the recent disaster that has befallen them. We wish them all the best as they try to deal with this great tragedy.

We would like to take this opportunity to add our voice to those of other members who have welcomed the approval of Justice Arbour as the new United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Like others, we believe that her international and national experience fully qualifies her to take up the duties of that very important post. We believe that she brings all the experience, wisdom, courage and vision required to fulfil the mandate of her very important office. The Republic of Korea will be fully supportive of her as she tries to fulfil her tasks.

The President: We have heard the last speaker on this item.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 117.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.25 a.m.